



Critics: Little oversight of MontCo. spending

By: **ALAN SUDERMAN**
Examiner Staff Writer
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Montgomery County Executive Ike Leggett is looking to cut funding for his office's internal audits -- a program that completed only one audit of county programs last year, raising concerns from critics that there is little oversight of how billions of dollars of taxpayer money is spent.

"It's like nobody's minding the store," said Council Vice President Valerie Ervin. "Where's the oversight?"

The criticism comes amid recent revelations that federal investigators are probing two county programs that may have misspent hundreds of thousands of dollars, and Leggett's administration has been accused of trying to hamper the work of the county's independent inspector general.

Leggett's proposed internal audit budget of \$441,000 for the next fiscal year is less than half of what the audit budget was two years ago, one of the many cuts Leggett is proposing in the face of a nearly \$800 million budget gap.

The internal audit office is tasked with ensuring county programs run efficiently and to deter fraud and abuse. Leggett shrunk the internal audit's staff last year from about five to only one, with the idea of contracting with outside firms to perform audits.

So far the county has received one completed audit from an outside firm. That audit cost \$16,000 and found the county's permitting services division erroneously undercharged by a total of \$71,000 during an 11-month period.

The county took more than six months to answer the *Washington Examiner's* public records request for copies of the internal audit division's work.

Besides that audit, the county has contracts to conduct a wide-ranging risk assessment -- essentially a work plan for future audits -- and to examine the county's embattled tuition assistance program. The county has accused a police officer of using the program to sell guns at steep discounts, and some employees used taxpayer money to take yoga classes, sailing lessons and other questionable courses.

Leggett spokesman Patrick Lacefield there is plenty of oversight by a variety of departments, like the CountyStat program and an independent inspector general, and by the county's managers.

"All of these elements work together to further oversight of county programs," Lacefield said.

Councilman Phil Andrews said he was thankful that the county had an inspector general but said a "robust internal audit vision" was still needed.

"I don't think that one audit a year is going to be sufficient," Andrews said.

Ervin said the County Council plans to take a hard look at the Leggett administration's oversight efforts and the allegations that it interfered with the inspector general's work.

"Our reputation is at a crossroads right now," Ervin said.

asuderman@washingtonexaminer.com

Read more at the Washington Examiner: http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/local/Critics_Little-oversight-of-Montgomery-County_s-spending-89808787.html#ixzz0kEjnxfwJ